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OBITUARY ON LIBERALISM

by Frank Chodorov

The miserable washout of the Liberal Party in the recent British election underlines the fact that liberalism, as a social and political philosophy, is dead. In no country does it claim adherents enough to make a respectable movement, let alone a political party of proportions. It has no press. In the "adopted" textbooks on political science and related disciplines it is referred to, if at all, in garbled manner as an historic curiosity.

The complete extinction of liberalism was long in coming. A century ago, Herbert Spencer pointed out, in his authoritative Social Statics, that even then liberalism had forfeited its virtue to political expediency; and predicted its ultimate demise. The liberals having abandoned their basic principles had drifted into what he calls the "New Toryism".

On the centenary of the publication of his famous book, now known only to incorrigible liberals, it might be well to restate the basic tenets of the philosophy -- as an obituary.

Liberalism -- under the political name of Whigism -- began as a rebellious movement during the reign of Charles II. It was then merely a protest against the remnants of feudalism. It struck out boldly against the regime of status, with a rigidly stratified society, encrusted with laws aimed to perpetuate social inequalities. It denied the validity of government responsible only to itself -- or God.

On the positive side, liberalism favored a regime of contract, under which the members of Society, operating for their mutual benefit, are free to carry on their affairs without governmental interventions. Society can best prosper by a system of voluntary co-operation, using the word co-operation in its widest sense; and even though the intent behind it is most altruistic, compulsory co-operation cannot favor the natural urge of men to better their circumstances. The only effective instrument for good, they maintained, is the conscience of Man.

Its political program was quite simple: remove restraints. The liberals of that day were all for abolishing laws and leaving the spaces blank. They conceded to government only one function, that of maintaining peace and order, with which they included the power to enforce contracts as between individuals, meting out justice quickly and inexpen-

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sively, and protection against foreign enemies. Political power could come to no good purpose if it ventured beyond this limited area.

The substance of liberalism is best expressed in the statement of Thomas Jefferson: "That government governs best that governs least."

II

In the beginning, liberalism had no definite ideational form. It was a revolt by oppressed people, directing its venom at the institution of arbitrary monarchy. The protestants were largely of the new industrial classes, in the cities, where specialization and exchange were replacing the self-sufficiency of agrarianism, and contract was a necessary condition of living. Though the idea did not take formal expression for some time -- perhaps not until Adam Smith -- they had begun to appreciate and trust the impartial judgment of the free market place; they wanted no interference with it.

Specifically, the interferences they found most irritating were those that impinged on the ordering of their personal lives: in matters of religion, assemblage and expression, and in taxation. The monarchy, which they conceived to be a civil, not a divine, institution, was transgressing justice when it presumed to dictate thought or control conscience, and was a definite deterrent to the good life when it took more than a reasonable amount of the national wealth for its legitimate expenses. It, not the people, had to be curbed.

Out of this instinctive reaction to personal hurt there grew up a body of ideas, or a philosophy, as well as a course of action. The basic axiom of this philosophy came to be known as "natural rights". These prerogatives reside in the individual, merely as a consequence and necessity of his existence; their authority is the Creator.

The individual is the only living reality. The environment and institutions about him are of his making and subject to his will. To further his prospects, he organizes Society, and lest his rights be disturbed or invaded by other members of the integration, he institutes government. The sovereignty enjoyed by the government is borrowed from the individual, and is revocable at will. From this line of thinking came the idea of representative and responsible government. It is the creature, not the creator, of Society.

On the economic side, and as a consequence of its "natural rights" tenet, liberalism developed the doctrine of <u>laissez faire</u>. If the functions of government are inherently negative -- protective -- it follows that it is incompetent in economic affairs. It cannot produce

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a single economic "good". Having established a system of legal equality among people of equal rights, its work is done, and it can best serve Society by keeping out of its way. Without interference, the individual will ply his particular trade with vigor, simply because his natural inclination is toward an abundance of satisfactions; and his industry will be spurred on by competition from equally free producers, and the market place will be filled to the brim.

This argument for economic freedom was supported by the record of intervention. Wherever government injects itself into the economy, it creates special privilege and monopoly, to the advantage of some citizens and the disadvantage of others. That is all it can do, since it is in no way a factor in production; it is by nature merely a policeman.

Thus it was that liberalism became the political expression of the philosophy of individualism, the active arm in the struggle of Man against the State. Whatever temporary tactics might dictate, the strategy of liberalism called for the whittling away of political power.

Opposition to liberalism acquired the name of Toryism. In the early period, Toryism was most virulent in the agricultural areas, where military chieftains had long held sway and had inculcated ideas of regimentation. With the advance of industrialism it became the gospel of government by an elite.

III

The decline of liberalism, the dilution of its philosophy, began with its success. As its advocates acquired political influence and power, the doctrine of negativeness gave way to positiveness. The about-face was supported with plausibilities, but the real cause for it must be traced to the human inclination toward the enjoyment of power, both for the exhilaration that comes from its use and for the accompanying emoluments and adulation.

The liberals argued, after they had come into power, that if the social good prospered by the removal of restraints, it was because those who effected the removal were instigated by the highest motive; hence, the good these men had accomplished by negative action would be vastly augmented by what they would do positively. It is not the laws that are bad, as the earlier liberals maintained, it is the bad lawmakers who frame them. So, they introduced laws to ameliorate some condition, and when the results proved unsatisfactory, they introduced laws to rectify the results; and every law enlarged upon their powers.

Then again, it was argued, since the laws instituted by the representatives of the people give expression to the general will, not the

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will of an irresponsible monarch, the restraints put upon the people are actually of their own making, and it is inconceivable that they would legislate to their own disadvantage.

Events have proven these arguments to be mere excuses for the acquisition of power. The idea that "my" doxy is orthodoxy while "yours" is heterodoxy is freely employed these days by Socialists to explain the failures of Socialism, more particularly in the case of Russia. Wherever Socialism does not bring about the promised result it is because those who managed it were incompetent, stupid, ignorant or just plain bad. It is never admitted that Socialism is per se incapable of what is claimed for it. Just so, the liberals could not conceive that the restraints they put on Society must be as evil in consequence as those instituted by Toryism.

As for the argument that laws enacted by the representatives of the people express their own will, even if this were true it would not deny the fact that these laws are interferences with their freedom. As Spencer puts it, "If men use their liberty in such a way as to surrender their liberty, are they thereafter any the less slaves?"

Regardless of such ratiocination, the fact remains that liberalism started to fail as liberals gained power and with the exercise of that power the philosophy lost more and more of its bloom. In the name of an ideal they had abandoned and traduced, they went in for rules, regulations and restrictions that in time outstripped by far the area of intervention covered by non-representative government. In the name of the public good they introduced a more vicious form of Toryism.

And thus, liberalism died.

IV

In 1851, Herbert Spencer published Social Statics: or the Conditions Essential to Human Happiness Specified. The book is out of print and copies are most difficult to obtain. In 1884, he published four of the essays that appeared in the original, with amendments, under the title The Man Versus the State. This book, which aroused a great deal of bitter criticism from the Socialist camp and which became the source-book for liberals of the old stripe, is also out of print. In 1945, the collection was again made available by the Caxton Printers, Inc., Caldwell, Idaho, under the editorship of Albert Jay Nock; included in this current edition are two related essays by Spencer, called Over-legislation and From Freedom to Bondage.

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Not Merely Gossip *A Supplement to* Human Events Vol. VII, No. 15

By Frank C. Hanighen April 12, 1950

THE CONGRESSIONAL RECORD: Late in March, the recently-installed Washington correspondent for the German News Agency (Western zones), sent home a sensational story. He said that Senators Wherry and McKellar had put pressure on John J. McCloy, High Commissioner to Germany, to stop the dismantling of the Salzgitter iron works. Mr. McCloy was visiting Washington at the time and the Senators had nailed him at an executive session of the Appropriations Committee. He did accede to the extent that the dismantling was ordered suspended. (See our issue of March 29). But thereby hangs another tale. American news agencies sell their services to a number of German papers which also use the German News Agency dispatches. When these papers received the latter's story on dismantling, they queried the American wire services which had not sent a word about it. After the Americans had checked and confirmed the news, one of them phoned Count von der Schulenberg, the correspondent who had sent the dismantling dispatch. "You must enjoy some awfully good pipe lines here", remarked one of them. "Schulie", as he is known to correspondents, only replied, "Yes, the best source in Washington -- the Congressional Record." And he referred the American journalist to a speech in the Record which told the story.

Likewise, those who feel mystified about the McCarthy-Lattimore affair, would do well to consult the Record of March 30, containing the Wisconsin Senator's long speech. In some passages (Record, p. 4448) McCarthy quotes freely from Lattimore's books on Asia (The Situation in Asia, The Solution in Asia and Manchuria: Cradle of Conflict) to show the Professor's views on China and Asia. These emphasize his long-held convictions that Soviet Russia has been fated to win all Asiatics to its side, that this is not Red Imperialism, that Russia is "creative" (while Western nations are not) and has an irresistible dynamism, and that there is and has not been anything we can do about it save submit to Russian victory. A very recognizable "line".

One newspaper, the Chicago Tribune, took advantage of this searching analysis in the Congressional Record. In an inimitable editorial (April 6) entitled "Lattimore's Vision of Destiny", the Tribune quotes copiously from the Professor's books, including a veritable Lattimore gem: "To be progressive in politics means to be on the side of that which is going up and against that which is going down." The Tribune winds up: "Senator McCarthy suggested that this last statement explains Mr. Lattimore. By his every account, Soviet Russia and Communism are bound to triumph. It is historically inevitable -- the Marxian view. So, said the Senator, Mr. Lattimore has chosen his side. If the investigating committee finds that Mr. Lattimore is not what Senator McCarthy says he is, will it kindly tell the American people just what he is?"

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TOURIST DOLLARS: In this, and the two following items, Edna Lonigan reports from Capitol Hill. Our planners have insisted that the "dollar gap" can be closed only by a great increase in imports into the United States, even if that means the ruin of such industries as the manufacture of watches and other time control devices very necessary in war. Lesser minds know that the gap could be closed much better by a little industry that did not need "technical assistance", that is tourism.

Almost one third of the dollars earned by Marshall Plan Europe last year was obtained from Americans who like travel. This took place despite the fact that tourism was the stepchild of the planners, and conditions in Socialist England were so bad that many travellers who had put England first on their list left after a few days.

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"Much of the neglect of tourism can be laid to the short-sightedness of the Marshall Plan countries", said Representative Mansfield of Montana. "Many of them are spending hundreds of millions of dollars on projects or industries that could not possibly measure up to the tourist industry as future dollar earners. In the latest studies made by these countries of their Marshall Plan programs, most of them do not even mention tourism." The failure to make improvements in tourist plant (so much cheaper and quicker than building factories or dams) has held the income from tourism lower than it need be. The newsphotos are showing how pilgrims to Rome are sleeping in tents.

ECA is now belatedly bringing hotel men here on expensive trips to examine our hotels, when there is not the slightest possibility that Europe can reproduce our hotel plant, nor any evidence that Americans go to Europe to get a replica of the Statler chain. One group of people in Europe did understand tourism, the little hotel and restaurant owners, and the waiters and chambermaids who wanted jobs, but they are not in the planning bureaus.

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LOCKING THE STABLE DOOR: Seven Republican Members of the House have come forward with a simple proposal to end deficit spending now. Congress sets a "debt limit" beyond which it cannot appropriate, and the Administration cannot borrow. So far, Congress has obligingly moved the "limit" whenever the Administration wanted more money, and it has even left a nice margin to invite further waste. The debt now stands at $256 billion, but the limit is set at $275 billion. Mr. Truman is helpfully trying to close the gap by increased spending. The Seven propose to close it by reducing the upper limit down to $257 billion. Thus the adherents of representative government are finally speaking out.

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THE LISTENERS: Our budget is intensely interesting to others if not always to us. Congressman Stefan of Nebraska told his colleagues that "representatives of foreign embassies in Washington carefully scrutinize, review and index every page of our appropriations hearings. . . . They are among the first to secure copies of the hearings." Every volume is indexed, item by item, by the staffs of the countries behind the Iron Curtain, which have been increased a hundred fold, as have their staffs in UN.

"Their objectives are", he continued, "information on atomic research, radar, jet propulsion, guided missiles, the securing of topographical maps of our coastal lines, our airports and military landing fields, data on biological warfare, and our industrial and military resources, among others. These groups are ever alert to secure any and all data to be forwarded to their homelands. They are endeavoring day and night to secure our know-how and to find wherein we may be vulnerable."

Their vigilance has made it necessary for Congress to get information on executive spending in off-the-record hearings, a situation which does not help us to obtain public knowledge and control of spending. Even on the floor, said Mr. Stefan, the Members of Congress feel "there are so many things that you do not dare talk about. . . . If we are, as the chairman says, nearing a hot war, beware, America."

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BUILDING PRICE SUPPORTS: In discussing business conditions in our March 29 issue we cited analysts who figured that building construction would hold up well during the coming year, if for no other reason than that government financing -- building price support -- had become such an important factor. Scarcely was the issue of HUMAN EVENTS in print when an incident occurred which illustrates the pressures that have been increasing over the years for this type of subsidy. One G. E. De Siena, Vice

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President of Superior Combustion Industries, Inc., of New York, wrote his Congressman a strong letter, sketching the disasters that would occur if Congress failed to re-enact the Federal loan provisions of Section 608 of the Federal Housing Act. These loan provisions expired March 1 and the question of renewal is now pending. Failure to renew, said Mr. De Siena (New York Times, April 3), would cut the building of garden-type apartments and multiple housing units by more than 50 per cent; heating equipment sales would hit the skids; as many as three million persons were in jobs affected by the legislation and the total volume of business involved was in excess of a billion dollars. Mr. De Siena's figures may be cut to fit his self-interest and are hence open to challenge by hard-hearted statisticians, but there is nothing in this world, not even an atomic war, that frightens Congress like the possibility of large-scale unemployment. We may toboggan into ultimate ruin by spending, but Congress will chance the ruin in the long run if, by spending, it thinks it can hold down the number of jobless in the short run.

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ECHOES FROM THE GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE: Lindsay C. Warren is the Comptroller General of the United States and presides over the activities of the 8,526 auditors, investigators, accountants and clerks of the General Accounting Office, an arm of Congress created in 1921 in order to "secure, independently of the executive departments and other spending and collecting agencies of the Government, the uniform settlement and adjustment of all claims and accounts in which the United States is concerned, either as debtor or creditor". As a sort of by-product of his labors, Warren from time to time sends up to the relevant Congressional committees reports on what is called Waste and Unwarranted Extravagance. These reports seldom are concerned with big investigations and do not often involve large sums. But they are superb examples of slovenly bureaucratic management. Warren says, "I cannot stop extravagance", but he is energetic in warning Congress of leaks, large and small. Here are three bits of spending that enraged the GAO in recent years:

1. Voucher 94482. State Department. Foreign Service telegrams. Three messages were sent, fast immediate transmission, of 262 words each, quoting statements of Bartley Crum in the New York Times. Cost, $1,117.18. These could have been sent night letter for $550.65, saving $566.53.

2. Another State Department Foreign Service voucher covered payment of $881.62 for a plain language radiogram of 5,186 words, sent to an American Embassy in Europe by fast Government class of service. Message could have been sent night letter for $587.75 for a saving of $293.87. "However", stated the GAO, "it also appears that the purpose of the message would have been served as well if it had been sent as mail in the diplomatic pouch." What was the crucial message? A list of the rabbis and theological students "in that particular country".

3. To illustrate excessive paper work, the GAO cited five purchase orders issued over a period of less than three weeks some time ago at the Naval Supply Depot at Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania. Here they are: The first order was for 24 oil wicks, "no value" -- 0; the second order was for a screw-cutout lead clamp -- 2 cents; the third order was for one gasket terminal box intake, 3 cents plus 1 cent packing and transportation -- 4 cents; the fourth order was for one breaker point and one feeder gauge at 4 cents each plus 1 cent packing and transportation -- 9 cents; the fifth order was for one cushion ring, 15 cents, less 25 per cent discount (4 cents) -- 11 cents; total paid for the five orders -- 26 cents.

"Each purchase instrument", said the GAO, "involves the preparation of several prescribed forms, comprising seven sheets of printed matter. As many as 23 copies of the order are distributed, or a total of 161 sheets. In the five cases a total of 800 sheets were required to cover purchases involving the total amount of 26 cents."

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Book Events

The Recollections of Alexis de Tocqueville; translated by Alexander Teixeira de Mattos; edited by J. P. Mayer. New York: Columbia University Press. $5.00. Reviewed by J. M. Lalley.

No Nineteenth Century student of history and politics, unless it was Karl Marx, better understood the direction in which European Society was evolving than the austere Norman nobleman, Count de Tocqueville. He knew that he was living in an age of continuous revolution and that this process, if accompanied by further concentrations of power, could lead nowhere but into a tyranny unrestrained by either custom or religion. Unlike most of his contemporaries, he recognized that the revolution was no less economic than political; in the growth of the industrial proletariat he observed in preparation all the phenomena that were to be catalogued more than a hundred years afterward by the Spaniard Ortega in the Revolt of the Masses; and in this light Tocqueville saw that the Revolution had accelerated rather than reversed tendencies at work under the Ancien Régime. But it was perhaps this clarity of vision, the power to separate himself from the optimistic illusions of his age, that made his brief career in statesmanship one of honorable failure. In 1839 he was elected to the Chamber of Deputies, and took his place there among the opposition to the government of M. Guizot until the downfall of the July monarchy, which he had been almost alone to foresee. Under the Second Republic he became a member of the Constitutional Commission, and struggled unsuccessfully to have the powers of government reorganized upon the principles of local autonomy and of institutional restraints upon both legislature and executive. In the first cabinet of President Louis-Napoleon, Tocqueville, who had supported the candidacy of General Cavaignac, became Minister for Foreign Affairs.

It was during his service as Foreign Minister that Tocqueville began the preparation of the Souvenirs, in which he recorded his interpretations of the events in which he had participated and his opinions about his important contemporaries, among them Louis-Philippe, Thiers, Lamartine, Louis Blanc, Ledru-Rollin, Lamennais, Montalembert, Louis-Napoleon and Blanqui. The Souvenirs were not published until 1893, or almost a quarter century after the death of their author, but even so there were some passages that his executors thought discreet to omit. The present volume is a revision of the translation into English -- not always idiomatic English -- that appeared in 1896, with the missing portions of the text restored by the aid of a new French edition. The Recollections begin with the February Revolution of 1848, and are continued until the end of Tocqueville's ministry. They include an account of the famous session of May 15, when the insurrectionary Socialist clubs took possession of the Assembly for three hours until they were forcibly expelled by the National Guards, and a memoir of the Paris insurrection of the following month, suppressed after three days of ferocious street fighting by the forces of General Cavaignac and by volunteers from the provinces. The book, however, is less valuable for its historical content, than for the political and philosophic lessons abstracted by Tocqueville from his experience and observation.

As a politician Tocqueville identified himself with no special party or interest; nor as a theorist is he the exponent of any of the great political creeds of his time. The "liberalism" that was to commend him to a later generation had little resemblance to the bourgeois liberalism of the July monarchy and even less to the liberalism of the Third Republic or to the Manchester liberalism of the English Radicals. His affinities lie closer to Montesquieu, Burke and especially Acton. His great passion was for the dignity of the human person and for the liberty necessary to its preservation. What he dreaded about democracy was the destruction of this dignity, not so much by violence as by the insidious regimen of mediocrity.

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